

Caste-Religion Inequalities in Occupational Attainment in Delhi in the 1970s

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This paper examines caste-religion inequalities in occupational attainment in Delhi in 1975-1976 to determine if Other Backward Classes (OBCs) were disadvantaged vis-à-vis Hindu upper castes on the eve of the establishment of the Second Backward Classes Commission (the so-called Mandal Commission). The paper finds no evidence of bias against OBCs in labour market outcomes at a time when this group did not benefit from reservation policies. Also, after controlling for education and employment-related characteristics, Muslims were not at a disadvantage in entering professional occupations.

I Introduction

Redressing the backwardness of the economically and socially disadvantaged groups has been a key element of economic policy of the Indian government since independence. Typically the lowest castes have been the most disadvantaged. Traditionally they were landless, occupied the lowliest jobs and were subject to social ostracism. Thus, the untouchable castes and backward tribes were scheduled by the Indian Constitution to receive preferential treatment in recruitment to public sector jobs. In particular, 12.5 per cent (15 per cent after 1970) of vacancies in the public sector were reserved for the scheduled castes and another seven per cent for the scheduled tribes. From 1962 the Government also required a similar proportion of places in government-funded higher education institutions to be reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

With the objective of promoting the welfare of other backward classes and redressing any inequities faced by them, the Government established the First Backward Classes Commission (the so-called Kalelkar Commission) in 1953 to come up with objective criteria for identifying backward classes and examine the desirability of providing safeguards through reservation in jobs and educational institutions. However, the Government did not accept the Commission's report and took no action on the recommendations as caste was used as the sole criterion for determining backwardness and for the classification of backward classes.¹ Subsequently, in 1961 the Government informed state governments that

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